

Who should be the author of a research paper?

Understanding authorship in research



Who can be called an “author” of a paper?

The answer seems obvious right?

You are the author of a paper when:



◎ You have written the research article by yourself.

◎ You are solely responsible for conducting the research upon which the article is based



Who authored your paper?

For single-author research papers, the answer is obvious. But what about journal articles with more than one author?

Many journal articles are the results of a collaboration:

Between researchers



Between and across institutes



Across disciplines and specializations



This automatically leads to an increase in the number of authors.

So what happens when many individuals are involved in a research project in different capacities?

Who qualifies as an author in such cases?

Who is an author?



An author is a person who has made “significant contributions to the intellectual content of the paper and is willing to take public responsibility for the entire study, including the data and results.”

- Basics of authorship in academic publishing
Mriganka Awati



Who is an author according to ICMJE guidelines?

According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' (ICMJE) guidelines, an author should have:



Contributed substantially to **conception and design**, **acquisition** of data, or **analysis and interpretation** of data



Drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content



Provided final approval of the version to be published



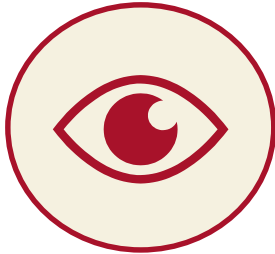
Agreed to be **accountable for all aspects of the work** to ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

**Who does
not qualify
as an
author?**

According to the ICMJE, completing any of the following tasks does not qualify you as an author:



Acquisition of funds



Supervision of work



Minor laboratory support



Administrative support



**Can the efforts of these individuals
still be acknowledged?**

YES!

Any individual who has contributed to the study in one or more of these ways or some other way but does not meet the authorship criteria can be mentioned in the **Acknowledgements section.**





Authorship v/s Contributorship

To resolve the confusion regarding authorship, some journals are moving from an authorship model to a contributorship model.

What is contributorship?

- The contributorship model requires authors to describe each person's contribution to the study.
- This description is usually appears as a footnote in the published article.

In what form do journals need authors to provide these details?

In the authorship form
(e.g., Journal of the
American Medical
Association)

In a **statement of
responsibility** specifying
the contribution of each
author (e.g., Nature
journals)



Unethical authorship practices

Here are 3 unethical authorship-related practices that you must avoid at all cost.

1. Honorary/gift authorship

- © This involves **naming an individual who has made no significant contribution to the study as an author.**
For instance, it could be the head of the department where the study is carried out.
- © This might be more common in cultures where supervisors and senior colleagues are assigned a lot of respect and it is considered appropriate to include them in the byline.



2. Guest authorship

- ◎ This involves **naming a certain person**; for instance, a senior, well-known researcher, **as an author with a hope that it will boost the chances of a paper being published.**
- ◎ However, this person's contribution to the research project may be insignificant.



3. Ghost authorship



- ◎ This involves omitting the name of a significant contributor from the byline as well as the Acknowledgments section.
- ◎ These individuals may include those who might be perceived as having conflicts of interest, medical writers, etc.

Tip:

When in doubt, consult the authorship guidelines provided by the journal you have chosen for your paper and resolve any disputes amicably.

That sums it up!

We hope this has broadened your understanding of authorship in research



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- Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors
<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html#two>
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How to decide the order of authors on a paper?

In multi-author papers, the sequence of authors is usually decided based on the contribution each author has made to the study.


On what basis should you list authors?



List authors in the order of the relative importance of their contributions.

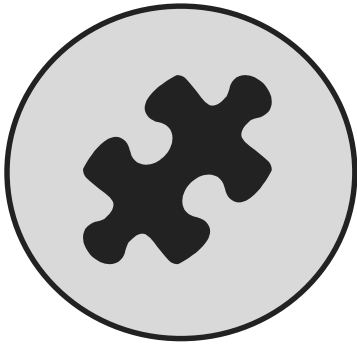
Based on this rule, the **first author** becomes the **main author** of the paper.

Remember: The last author could be an exception to this rule. He/she could often be the head of the department in which the research was carried out.



**Who
qualifies
to be
the first
author?**

The first author usually makes the most significant intellectual contribution to the work by:



Designing the study



Acquiring and analyzing data from experiments



Writing the manuscript



**Why do researchers value being
a first author?**



If your paper is cited in new work, **all in-text citations and other mentions of your paper** will refer to it using the first author's name (e.g. 'Jones et al. report that...').



In some cases, **Ph.D. students** are required to have at least one paper in which they are the first author to qualify for a degree.



For **post-doctoral researchers and senior professors**, publishing first-authored papers improves their prospects for receiving funding, and getting promoted or re-hired.

**How
should you
list the
remaining
authors?**

- ◎ Once the first author is determined, list subsequent authors based on their individual contributions to the research
- ◎ Start with the author who has contributed the most and move your way down to the one who has contributed the least.

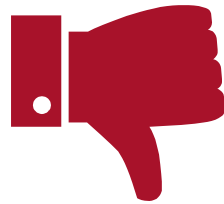




Is there another way to decide the order of authors?

Yes. *In some fields of the humanities, such as political science, researchers are required to list authors alphabetically.*

Is listing authors alphabetically a foolproof practice?



Although, this may seem like a great way to avoid authorship disputes, it does have its **disadvantages**:

- An alphabetic listing of authors **does not give readers a clear indication about who contributed the most.**
- If the **main author's name** begins with a letter late in the alphabet, it **might be overlooked, or hidden in the "et. al." list** when the paper is cited.



When should you decide the order of authors?

The best time to start is at the outset of the research project.

Remember:



All individuals involved in the research project **must ideally agree** upon the order of authors decided.



Maintain a record of **each of the contributors** involved throughout the project.



Any changes in the level of involvement, or the addition or exclusion of some members, **during the project** should be approved by the **individuals involved**.



These changes should also **reflect in the author byline**. If such changes occur after a manuscript has already been submitted, it should be explained to the journal.

REFERENCES

- Deciding the order of authors on a paper
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- Lake D.A. (2010). Who's on First? Listing Authors by Relative Contribution Trumps the Alphabet. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 43, 43–47.

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